

Is It a Trail or Is It a Playground?

An Evaluation of the Sherose Island Nature Trail

This study was designed to gain a better understanding of community perspectives of the Sherose Island Nature Trail, located in the Municipality of Barrington in Nova Scotia.



MULTIPLE METHODS WERE USED TO CAPTURE A RANGE OF COMMUNITY VIEWS, INCLUDING AN ONLINE SURVEY, A PHOTOGRAPHY CHALLENGE, INTERVIEWS, OBSERVATIONS, AND PHOTOSTORIES WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH.

TOP PERCEIVED BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN



1 Playing outdoors / nature play



2 Physical activity



3 Mental break/ mental wellbeing



4 Meeting other children

TOP REASONS FOR VISITING THE TRAIL



1 Being outdoors



2 Time with family/friends



3 Physical activity



4 Mental wellbeing

CORRESPONDINGLY

TOP PERCEIVED BENEFITS IDENTIFIED



1 Physical activity



2 Time with family/friends



3 Mental wellbeing



4 Being outdoors

Prominent trail activities and experiences for children and teens:

Exploring the painted rocks

Venturing the trails

Outdoor play

Nature/risky play, such as playing on the side trails and in the mud, and climbing on rocks and trees

The study reveals there is potential for taking an innovative approach to reimagining the trail beyond a 'traditional understanding of a nature trail' to consider other ways of reconnecting with nature through play, recreation, and leisure for people of all ages.

The findings highlight the possibilities for the trail to be a natural playground for outdoor, nature, and risky play.

Outdoor play is broadly defined as play that takes place outdoors. Nature play is play that takes place in a natural environment or involving interaction with natural materials. Risky play is "a form of play that is thrilling and exciting, which involves uncertainty, unpredictability, and varying degrees of risk-taking."¹

Benefits include: fostering creativity, resilience, socio-emotional learning, cognitive development, mental health, physical health and risk negotiation skills, connection to nature, environmental awareness, amongst others²³⁴

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Develop and share** collective values and vision for the trail to support outdoor, nature, risky, and intergenerational play
2. **Create programs and partnerships** across sectors to help reduce barriers to connect community with nature
3. **Create an accessible nature trail** that is an inclusive community space for diverse experiences in nature
4. **Seek ongoing support and resources** for future trail development and community recreation programming



The full report may be accessed [here](#).

¹ Lee, E.Y., et al. (2022, p. 12). Play, learn, and teach outdoors-network (PLaTO-Net): Terminology, taxonomy, and ontology. The International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, 19(1), 66-66. ² Brussoni, M. (n.d.). Outdoor risky play. Retrieved from the OECDLibrary, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/>. ³ Little, H. (2017). Risk-taking in outdoor play: Challenges and possibilities. In H. Little, S. Elliot & S. Wyer (Eds.), Outdoor learning environments: Spaces for exploration, discovery and risk-taking in the early years (pp. 19-38). Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin. ⁴ Chawla, L., Keena, K., Pevec, I., & Stanley, E. (2014). Green schoolyards as havens from stress and resources for resilience in childhood and adolescence. Health & Place, 28, 1-13.